

when it's cold by ningdom

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Body Horror, Forgot to mention earlier but there is some idealization of suicide in here, Graphic Description, Multi, Post-Canon, actual fic is gen just alot of implied/mentioned ships, basically no plot just some character ramblings, but i love my son will byers, hell u could even say implied will/lucas, i ahte this show, unbetad so if u see mistakes pls point out!, very very introspective, wink face

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Mentioned), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington (Mentioned), Will Byers

Relationships: Ambiguous or Implied Relationship(s), Implied Mike/Eleven, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Will Byers & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler & Dustin Henderson, Will Byers & Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

Will deals with the aftermath of the Upside-down, and life goes on.

when it's cold

Author's Note:

as i mentioned in the tags, all the ships listed are purely mentioned or implied!

hello guys this is my first ST fic and im literally crying bc i love my son will byers pls more will content. i have to be the content that i desire
also this is like 99% pointless rambling so yeah dont expect any plot or anything fancy im a sham of a writer

unbetad, so please point out errors you see!
thanks for reading ;-)

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Everybody treats Will differently.

His mother and Jonathan are nearly overbearing with how protective of him they get - it's not that he doesn't appreciate it, but sometimes it's hard to breathe. He never goes anywhere by himself now; he's not allowed to leave the house on his own. One of them always walks him to school, or at least to the intersection where he meets up with Mike, Lucas, and Dustin. He knows from picking up the bones of conversations that Jonathan requested to have his first period free so that he could walk Will if he needed to, and the school accepted.

Jonathan was never very touchy-feely before the Upside-down, limiting his physical contact with Will to quick hugs and jerky pats on the shoulder. The day that Will came home from the hospital, he'd been preoccupied with reconciling the familiar surroundings of his house with the nightmarish version that had existed in the otherworld, and straining his ears for foreign growls and static. The hand that came out of nowhere and clapped him on the back was Jonathan's, but it had torn a startled scream from his throat and he'd thrown himself across the room.

The look on his brother's face had been a hundred times worse than

anything the Upside-down had thrown at him. Nothing there had ever made him feel guilty.

Jonathan must have told their mom about the incident, because the next time she goes to hug him, there is a brief flash of hesitation in her eyes - a question she's asking Will without opening her mouth.

Is this ok?

Will thinks about what could possibly be living inside him, and answers it for her by taking a shaky step backwards.

She went through hell to protect him, and protecting her in return is the least he can do.

(In the weeks that follow, Will's aversion to touch grows into a beast of it's own. It's a shameful mixture of his fear for others and his fear for *himself* - hands wrapping around his wrists or arms feels like the oozing grasp of shadowy tentacles, grabbing him to try and slow him down - fingers in his hair are the jittering legs of a grotesque, twisted spider - sudden physical contact is the monster *finally, finally, finally catching up to him*.

The knowledge that there's *something inside of him* only cements it.

Somehow, it spreads around. Don't touch Will Byers, he'll scream. He'll hit you. He's crazy. There's something wrong with him. His friends don't listen at first, but when Dustin gives him a friendly punch on the shoulder Will's heart skips a beat and he forgets to breathe, they stop and give him space. They don't really understand, but they're trying, and that means the world to him.)

After that, his mother begins to treat him like glass. Any mention of the Upside-down is completely avoided. Anything that could remind him of the trauma is erased. Will understands, he does - she'd followed him all the way down. She'd walked through the same dark, ashen world that he had, all to find him. She'd seen it. The black trees, the living vines, the alien sludge. The thing in his throat.

That's *all* he wants her to know about, and he welcomes the avoidance on her end. He's always been smart - he can see from the

bags that are still under her eyes that the time he'd been in the Upside-down hadn't been easy for her, either.

Out of the whole thing, Will thinks that's what he hates the most.

He wants her and Jonathan to forget and go back to their lives and leave him to deal with it on his own. They don't need to get drawn into that world any more than they already are - it's over for them, and he wants it to stay that way.

Mostly, Will *wants* to talk to someone. Someone that isn't anyone that will look at him any differently. He wants to talk to someone that understands, someone that won't flinch away when he mentions the *eggs* or the *slugs* or the *fog* or the way the monster breathed like it was *giggling* when it smelled blood.

(In a tiny childish piece of his mind that's slowly managing to snuff out, he wants to close his eyes and wish it all away . He wants to wake up and have the past month as just a dark, dark fever dream. Selfishly, he wants his mom and his big brother to make it all go away. That's what moms and big brothers do - they save him. She called the principal when Troy and James gave him a black eye, and Jonathan corners them in an alley and scares them half to death. They didn't bother him for two weeks after that. They've always tried their hardest for him, and before the Dark, he'd believed that they could do anything.

Reality is harsh. They came for him; but Will knows, now, that they were too late.

Honestly, he's grateful that someone came at all.

He's grateful that he didn't die there, alone.)

Officer Hopper comes by often, nowadays. Will isn't stupid - he sees the way the cop and his mother look at each other. He likes Hopper, so he doesn't say anything. Hopper keeps an eye on him, Will notices, when he's in the room. He watches Will with wary eyes and a hard expression, like he's waiting for the other shoe to drop, or waiting for Will to show cracks. It's ok, because Will's waiting too.

Mike, Lucas, and Dustin are normal, for the most part. Sometimes Mike will stare off into space and Lucas and Dustin will look at Will like they can't believe he's really there, but those things are always washed away with fun. At times, Will even manages to block it out of his mind and go with the flow. It always comes back, with the coughing and the dark, but it's better.

They tell him stories, stories about a girl with psychic powers and a secret government agency of Bad Men. Mike's the one that tells Will what happened to the girl, with far-away eyes and a wistful expression that Will's never seen on his face before. Lucas tells him about how they all tried to find the portal to the Upside-down to go in after Will, and for a split second just hearing those words makes Will's heart nearly stop. He's suddenly struck by the wish to meet Eleven himself, just to thank her with everything he has for stopping them.

He thinks about his friends, charging after him into the writhing darkness of the other world with nothing but slingshots and knives to defend themselves. When Lucas starts to snifle and says in a tiny, uncharacteristic voice that he feels guilty for not managing to go into the Upside-down himself to help Will like a 'true party member would have done', Will closes his eyes and reaches his arms around Lucas' shoulders. He keeps his head leaned as far back as it can go, and he sucks his stomach in, trying as hard as he can to hug his friend but keep anything that might be inside of him out of reach. He knows it's a child's logic - as long as nobody touches the 'bad parts' they'll be fine - but he can't help it.

Lucas stares at Will for a second before choking out a laugh and blinking away the tears that had been building in his eyes. "What the hell are you doing, Byers?" Lucas asks.

"Hugging you." Will says softly.

Lucas shakes his head. "Kind of a shitty hug." He croaks, but the tone he speaks in doesn't match the words at all.

Dustin's the one that tells him about how the group had fallen to bickering pieces without Will there.

"I dunno, dude, it was crazy. I don't think we've ever fought that much before." Dustin says. "It's like- Mike's the leader, right?"

Will nods. This is fact.

"Me and Lucas, we're the brain and the brawn." He remarks, picking at his gums with his tongue.

"I don't think Lucas would agree to that." Will says matter-of-factly.

Dustin shrugs. "Maybe we're half of one each. I'm half brain and half brawn, and so is he. Together, we make the brain and the brawn."

"I don't think that's how it's supposed to work."

"Well," Dustin frowns. "That's how it works now." He suddenly shakes his head like a dog shaking off water. "I'm gettin' off topic. None of that really matters. What does matter is that whatever we are, you're like the glue."

Will blinks. "The glue?"

Dustin grins, bright as always. "Yeah! Without you there, we all fell apart and started yellin' at each other. You know, you always wind up playin' the old, wizened Wizard character in Dungeon and Dragons because you've got that... sage-y peacemaker vibe. You're always honest, and you always tell the truth. If you say something, everyone always listens. You're the guy that calms everyone down when we start arguing."

"I do?" Will whispers as he stares down at his feet. Maybe this had been the Him of Before, but now...

He lies about a lot of things, now. He's always lying, he thinks, as visions of darkness and slugs and cracked bathroom mirrors flash through his mind.

Dustin continues on, oblivious to the turn Will's thoughts have taken. "You do." He confirms. "I had to fill in for you, you know, when you were- when you were gone."

Will looks up, thrown back to the present. "It's not like it's my job, or

anything.”

Dustin wrinkles his nose. “It sucked. Nobody would listen to me, and everything just kept es- es- what’s that word?”

Will thinks. “... Escalating?”

“Yeah!” His friend exclaims with a vigorous fist-pump. “That one. Stuff kept doing that. Lucas nearly flipped his shit. He was ready to storm the Hawkins Lab by himself!”

Will looks back down at the ground, mouth and eyes tightening. He swallows, hard. It doesn’t feel good.

Dustin goes quiet for a moment, before slouching. “It wasn’t your fault.” He says softly.

Will nods, but he doesn’t feel it.

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He’s caught by surprise one day, when Nancy comes over to spend the night with Jonathan.

Before, their mom would have lost her mind. But after the monster and the Upside-down, the more people in the household, the better. She trusted Jonathan and Nancy to not do anything stupid, and didn’t make any move to stop them.

Will wasn’t entirely sure what was going on in that corner, anyways. He was pretty sure that his brother and Nancy were doing boyfriend-girlfriend stuff, but he also knew that Nancy was still with Steve Harrington, and that Jonathan knew. Sometimes Steve even came by alone, and sometimes him *and* Nancy came by together. Will wasn’t even going to try figuring that one out, but if his brother was happy with it, then so was he.

Either way, Nancy comes over one night to see Jonathan. The next morning, when his brother is still asleep, Nancy knocks on Will’s door. Will had woken up hours ago and been unable to fall back asleep, so he whispers ‘come in’ as softly as he can.

Nancy cracks the door open a sliver, and slips in. She walks over to his bed awkwardly and sits down at the foot of it. "Hi, Will." She murmurs.

"Hi, Nancy." Will says back. This is... an unprecedented event. Nancy has never gone out of her way to be in his company - he's one of her little brother's annoying friends. He thinks, briefly, that this visit may be her trying to get closer to her new boyfriend's family, but he's proven wrong rather quickly.

"You really..." She starts off, biting her bottom lip, before seemingly mustering the courage to speak and continuing. "You really survived over there? For a whole week?"

Will sits up very slowly. "...Yeah." He says, guarded.

She's quiet for a long while, before finally frowning. "I was in there for probably about ten minutes. I had nightmares for weeks - hell, I still have nightmares. I-" She gets up suddenly, startling Will into nearly standing up himself. "I'm sorry. This is selfish of me. I should go."

Will shakes his head, fast. "No, it's fine. You... want to talk about it? Or-"

Nancy's mouth tightens into a tiny line. "... Maybe, but. I- I have to know. Did you - Did you see Barb there? How - How late were we to help her? If we'd gotten there, a day, an hour, a couple of *minutes* earlier, could we have saved her?"

He's not sure why he didn't expect them, but Nancy's questions throw him off-balance. Will frowns. "I- I don't know. I didn't really... catch any names." He says softly. "What did she look like?"

Nancy stares at him for a moment. "Red- short, red hair. Glasses? Freckles?"

A face comes to mind immediately, one days dead with slugs and spiders crawling through her corpse and her ribs splayed out, open to the world, and Will feels sick to his stomach."I don't think that she - she was there. For long." He whispered. "And... I don't think that

those are good questions to be asking yourself. There's no point in-" He chokes down a sudden, *violent* cough, and feels his wet lungs rattle in his chest. For a brief second, his bedroom is dark, ashen, and covered in inky tendrils that sprawl over every surface. The world shifts back to normal the next time he opens his eyes - Nancy looks concerned, and Will panics when he feels something shift in his throat and excuses himself to the bathroom to gag.

When he comes back, she is gone. He is all at once disappointed and relieved.

(Disappointed that someone who wants to talk about the otherworld left, and relieved that she won't have to hear any of it.)

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On the first day of the second month since his return, he gets stuck in the Upside-down for an entire hour. By the time the world rights itself, he's curled up on the cool tile of the shower floor in a pool of black goo, and he can barely think straight. His thoughts are a shattered mess of *run* and *hide* and *look around you* and *whatever you do, don't bleed* and it takes him a whole nother hour to calm down.

His little 'trips' back to the otherworld had been slowly increasing in frequency and length, but none had lasted for over thirty minutes. He's constantly looking over his shoulder, waiting for the other shoe to drop, waiting for the world to shift again and take him back. There are more dangers in the Upside-down than just the monster, he *knows*

.

He's brought some of them home with him, Will thinks dazedly as he watches a black and sickly yellow slug slowly squirm it's way down the shower drain.

He thinks about getting a knife, and taking it to his own stomach. Of cutting a line right down the middle, and letting whatever is festering in his gut pour out onto the floor.

It's wishful thinking. He'll never do it, no matter how much he wants to die when he feels his throat squirm. Everyone called him brave for living through the Upside-down, but in reality all he'd done was run

and hide until he couldn't anymore, and he's not gotten any better.

Will Byers isn't brave. He's a coward, and he wants to live.

This is where Jonathan finds him when he gets home, still lying on the shower floor, fully clothed, the black sludge having all but dispersed down the drain, leaving no evidence.

Jonathan crawls inside the tiny shower with him and settles down as comfortably as he can without saying a word. He simply sits, and his presence alone chases all the shadows away into the corners of the room.

They're not gone, but for the moment, Will is safe.

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